



TEXAS GENERAL LAND OFFICE JERRY PATTERSON, COMMISSIONER

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MEDIA ADVISORY

New Alamo exhibit details birth of Spanish Texas

Follow-up to Travis Letter event highlights Mission period

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SAN ANTONIO — Today, the Alamo and the Texas General Land Office announced the long-awaited follow-up to the highly successful Travis Letter exhibit with an exhibition of rare, original Spanish documents dating back to the foundation of the Alamo, and the mission system in San Antonio, in the 1700s.

“Alamo Origins: The Birth of Spanish Texas” will open in the historic Alamo church on September 6 and run through December. The exhibit is free and open to the public. It is considered one of the first, large-scale public exhibits at the Alamo to specifically examine the origins of the Alamo and the Spanish mission system and their roles in the creation of Texas.

“Everyone remembers the Fall of the Alamo in 1836,” said Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson, “but we want you to learn about the Rise of the Alamo that started in 1718. The story of where the Alamo came from – and who started it – is equally compelling and long overdue. The Texas we all know today started here, and it’s time we Texans knew it.”

Patterson, history buff and now steward of the historic former Spanish mission, has long been an advocate for expanding the study of Texas history to include Native Americans and Tejanos, or Texans of Hispanic heritage. This exhibit is the first of two exhibits that will highlight the Hispanic contribution to Texas and the Alamo. The second installment is slated for the spring of 2014.

“With immigration in the forefront of public discussion,” Patterson said, “it’s important to remember that Texas began as a part of the Spanish Empire ruled from Mexico and that the first illegal immigrants had names that looked a lot more like mine. This is the whole story of the Alamo. John Wayne didn’t make a movie about it, but it’s just as important.”

For years, the Alamo story focused on the Texas Revolution and its Anglo defenders. But “Alamo Origins: the Spanish Birth of Texas” will feature 16 original documents in Spanish — with English translations provided — telling the story of the mission’s founding, the daily lives of the Native Americans who sought protection there and the eventual secularization, or transfer of ownership, of mission property.

The 16 documents that will be displayed inside the Shrine – originally begun as the mission church – were culled from the archival collections of the General Land Office, the Alamo and the Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library. The fragile Spanish maps and documents provide fascinating insight on the missions as frontier outposts vital to the Spanish Empire’s control of the region and defense against incursions by the French.

Mission San Antonio de Valero was just one of several Spanish missions in Béxar. The area was an ideal location for settlement by the Spanish missionaries because of ample farmland, abundant waters from the San Pedro Creek, and access to *acequias* (irrigation ditches) and terraced fields that were already in use by the indigenous population. Once converted, the surviving Coahuiltecan Indians would receive the lands and property of each mission in a process known as secularization. This founding, converting and finally divesting of mission property was well documented by the Spanish commanders and missionaries, as revealed by the 16 documents showcased in the exhibit.

“When you can see the original Spanish decree that authorized Capt. Juan Valdez, the military garrison commander, to select a site for a new mission, it brings this history to life,” Patterson said. “Texans love their history. This exhibit adds depth and richness that most folks won’t expect.”

“Alamo Origins: The Birth of Spanish Texas,” will be open to the public seven days a week from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. from September 6 to December 31. As always, the Shrine of Texas Liberty is open to visitors free of charge. Visitors are asked to be silent and respectful when viewing the documents and no flash photography will be allowed to protect the light-sensitive paper.

For more information on the Alamo, please visit www.travisletter.org or the Official Alamo website at www.thealamo.org.

“Come to the Alamo and see the true story of Texas,” Patterson said.

WHO: Lovers of Texas history
WHAT: Alamo Origins: The Birth of Spanish Texas
WHEN: Sept. 6 through Dec. 31, 2013
WHERE: The Alamo, 300 Alamo Plaza, San Antonio, Texas 78205
WHY: To examine the origins of the Alamo and the Spanish mission system and their roles in the creation of Texas.

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